

**Marlin First Model derringer**



**'Never Miss' derringers**

# The Marlin Firearms Co.

William S. Brophy

The Marlin Firearms Company has played an important role in the development and expansion of an industry which has made significant contributions in the development of machinery and fabrication methods, interchangeability of parts and testing and gauging methodology.

But first, what is the gun industry and how did it start?

When America was first colonized, firearms were needed for obtaining food as well as protection. The gun makers and gunsmiths of the time were individuals who either apprenticed with a craftsman and learned a new skill, or one who came to America with knowledge in this field. Few of these men were capable, or equipped, to make the lock, stock and barrel of a firearm; most used imported locks and barrels until their small businesses developed and expanded.

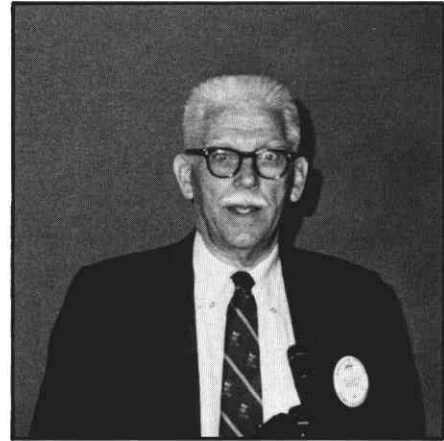
By the mid-1700s, production of hunting arms was adequate. The various parts were frequently made in small cottage shops; they were then finished and assembled at the gunsmith's shop.

Felicia Johnson Deyrup, in her scholarly work, *Arms Making in the Connecticut Valley*, covers the subject better than I can. It is highly recommended reading for any arms enthusiast.

The eventual need for military arms resulted in government installations being established, rather than the "Gunsmith/Gunshop" fabrication of firearms made on a custom basis. Such places as Springfield Armory, Springfield, Massachusetts, developed machines and methods of fabrication which were used for years.

Although the government was in the firearms business, other sources had to be found to meet the ever expanding requirements for more arms. Many experienced gunsmiths were brought into the expanding industry, and manufacturers of other commodities envisioned an opportunity to do well in this new market. Names such as Eli Whitney, Simeon North, Spencer, Stone, Leonard, R & J Johnson, Nathan Starr, and others are found on contracts for stands of arms needed to supplement the government's manufacturing ability.

Eventually the manufacture of arms developed into an industry; to satisfy the need for increased production, many new methods of manufacture were developed. A good example is the Thomas Blanchard lathe for turning gunstocks. Developed in 1821, it revolutionized the



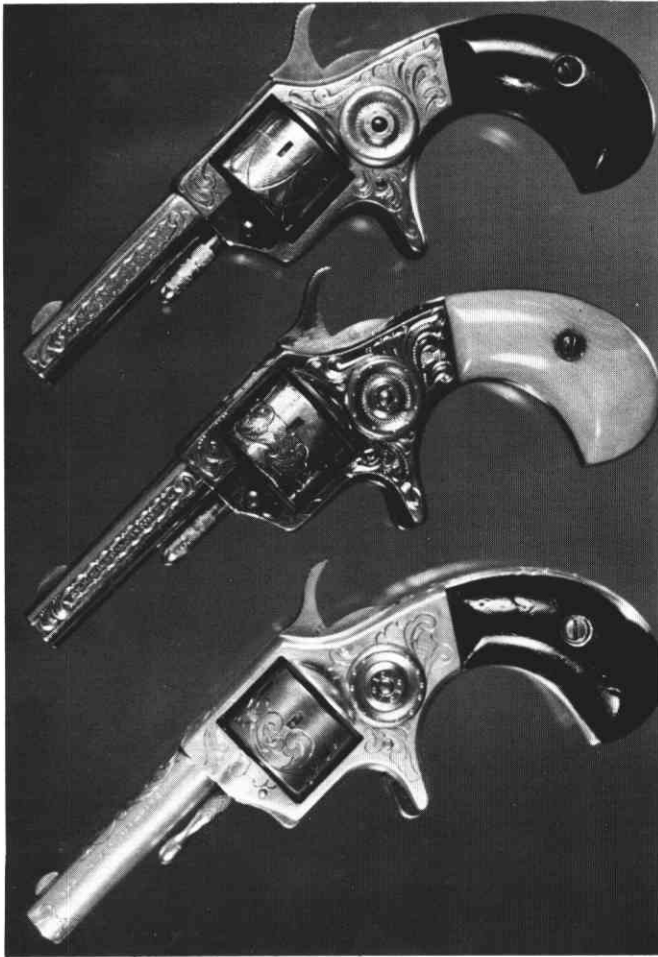
manufacture of a gunstock which had previously been done mostly by hand.

The period of time when the greatest changes took place in the arms industry was during the Civil War. Not only were demands made on the industry for large numbers of hand and shoulder arms, but dramatic changes in the types of ammunition used were taking place. Cap and ball muzzle loaded ammunition was quickly being phased out by cartridges which could be loaded from the breech.

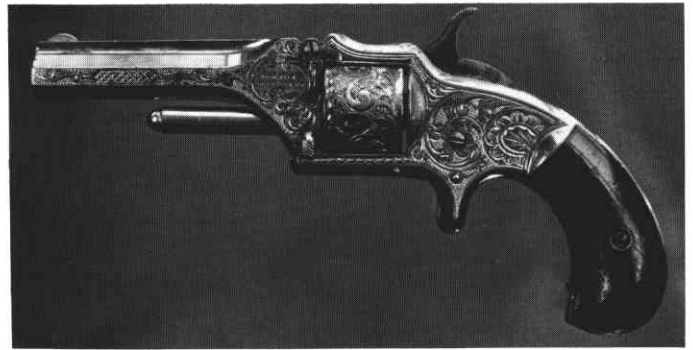
With the development of new cartridges hundreds of mechanisms in both handgun and rifle were invented. Many included a repeating capability: numerous cartridges were stored in the gun by many different systems. After all of these many different cartridge and firearm systems were tested, under many different kinds of conditions, a few were found to be reliable and worthy of further development. The eventual result was two accepted types of cartridges, the rim fire and the center-fire, both of which are standard today. Breech loading firearms were further developed once the type ammunition was settled upon. All Marlin firearms were manufactured for use with breechloading metallic ammunition.

John M. Marlin was born in 1836 at Rainbow, Connecticut. At age 18, he signed a statement of terms with the American Machine Works to labor under their direction at the machinist trade until he became 21 years of age. For the first six months he received no pay. For each subsequent six months period, until he became 21, he received an increase, to a high of four dollars a week for the last six month period.

In 1863, John Marlin was first listed in the New



"OK" and "Little Joker" revolvers



"XXX Standard 1872" revolvers: 1st variation, transition, 2nd variation.



"No. 32 Standard 1875" revolver, with De Gress grips.

Haven City Directory as a pistol maker, and except for the period 1867-1869, when he was not mentioned in city directories, Mr. Marlin was listed until 1881 as a pistol manufacturer, or gun and pistol manufacturer.

In 1882 the Marlin Fire Arms Company was incorporated with a capital of \$200,000. Officers were Charles Daly, President, J.M. Marlin, Treasurer, C.F. Demmer, Secretary. Daly was connected with Shoverling, Daly and Gales, a New York sporting goods concern.

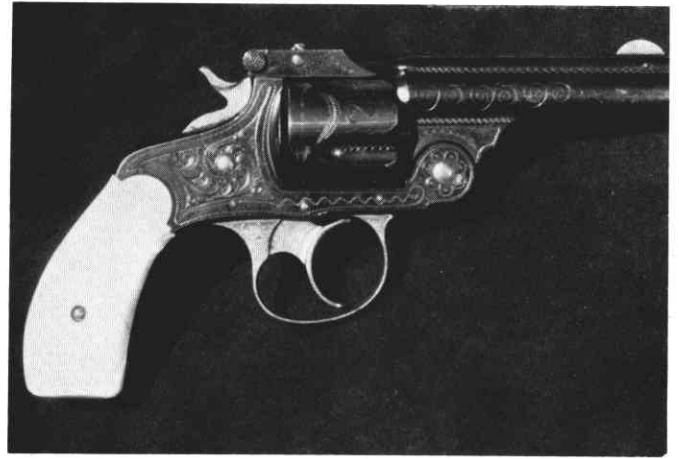
In 1893, John Marlin bought out Mr. Daly and all other stockholders; the company was exclusively owned by J.M. Marlin and his family until 1915. Mr. Marlin died in 1901. His sons, Mahlon and Howard, continued the business after his death.

### HANDGUNS

John Marlin's entry into the firearms industry was by the manufacture of small single shot derringer-type pistols. The four variations produced from about 1863 until the 1880s included caliber .22, .30, .32 and .41 models. Typical of the small pistol manufacturer of the day, John Marlin named his first models. The names chosen were *OK*, *Never Miss* and *Victor*. A total of ap-



**"38 Standard 1878" revolver.**



**Marlin Model 1887 double action revolver.**

proximately 16 thousand of these small guns were manufactured.

Recognizing the limited potential for his petite single shot derringers, Mr. Marlin expanded his business to include single action revolvers. Six different models were produced between 1870 and 1887. These included those identified as the *OK* and *Little Joker* pocket revolvers and the larger *XX*, *XXX No. 32* and *38 Standard* revolvers. In 1887 John Marlin introduced his model 1887 double action revolver. The last of his DA production was in 1899. Some of the Marlin pistols and revolvers were ornately engraved, gold, silver and nickel plated and have pearl, ivory, rosewood or hard rubber grips. Seldom found in excellent condition, Marlin handguns are today truly collector's items.

### **THE BALLARD RIFLE**

The Ballard rifle was patented in 1861 by Mr. C.H. Ballard. It has been reported that it was used during the Civil War by the state of Kentucky. It was manufactured by the Merrimack Arms Co., Newburyport, Massachusetts, 1866 to 1869, by the Brown Mfg. Co., Newburyport, Massachusetts, 1869-1873, and by J.M. Marlin from 1875 to about 1890.

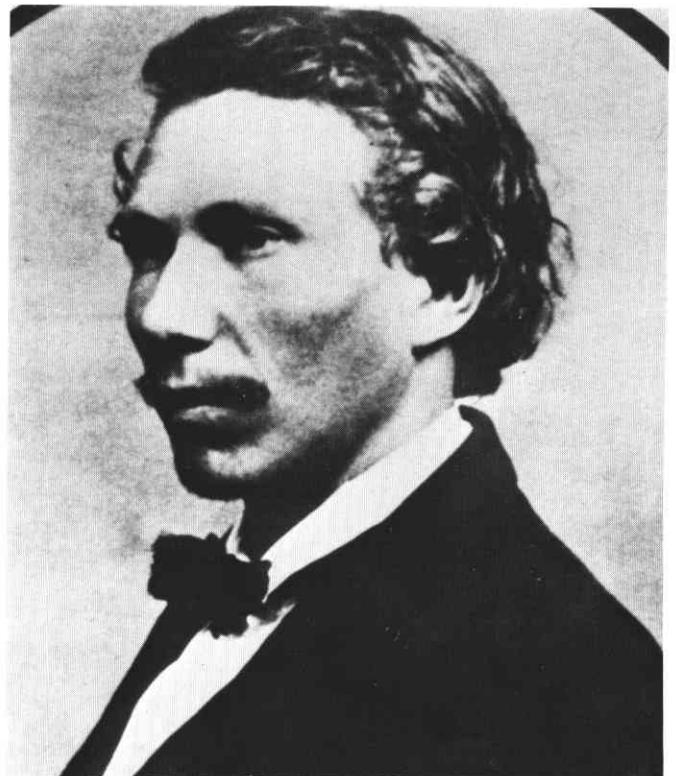
Mr. Marlin received a patent for a reversible firing pin for the Ballard in 1875. From information available it appears that about 40,000 Ballards were manufactured. It would take at least a couple of hours to even scratch the surface of the Ballard story — I'll leave it for another time!

### **ANDREW BURGESS**

Andrew Burgess was born at Lake George, New York, on January 16, 1837. He was an assistant to the famous Civil War photographer Mathew B. Brady during that war and during the early 1870s he bought out the Brady business. (Some of the famous pictures of Lincoln were taken by Andrew Burgess.) However, it is his talent



**Ballard rifle with Rigby barrel.**



**Andrew Burgess.**



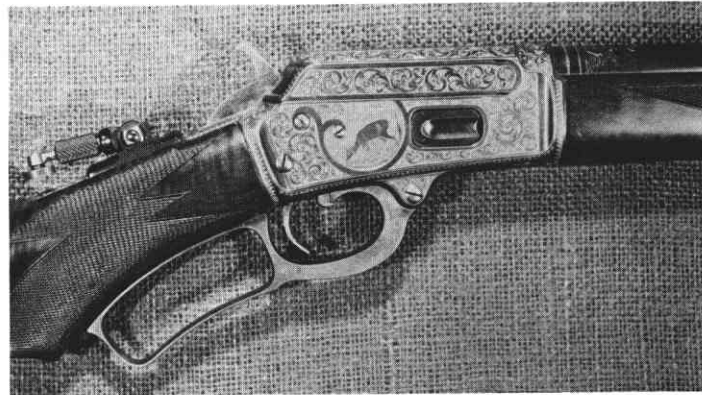
**Prototype of John Marlin's first lever action rifle, which was never placed in production.**



**Marlin Model 1881 rifle.**



**Marlin Model 1888 rifle.**



**Marlin Model 1889 side-ejector rifle.**



**Marlin Model 1891 side-loading .22 rifle.**



**Marlin Model 1891 .22 rifle, second variation.**



**Marlin Model 1892 .22 rifle.**



**Marlin 1894 .22 rifle.**

as a firearm inventor which is of interest to the gun collector and Marlin historian.

The most complete biography of Andrew Burgess is found in Sam Maxwell's excellent book, *Lever Action Magazine Rifles*, which is about rifles derived from the patents of Andrew Burgess. This book is recommended reading for more complete information about this famous gun inventor, who left his mark on Marlin, Colt, Winchester, Whitney and his own Burgess Gun Company.

Although Andrew Burgess did not design or invent a specific model of Marlin Rifle, fundamental features of some of his many patents were incorporated into the design of the Model 1881 Rifle.

Andrew Burgess's contributions to the Model 1881 rifle resulted in John Marlin building a successful lever action rifle business. One can only wonder: if his genius had not been incorporated into Marlin's first successful repeating rifle, would the Company be where it is today?

Mr. Burgess died on December 19, 1908. He was interred at his home in Owego, New York.

#### **LEWIS LOBDELL HEPBURN**

Mr. L.L. Hepburn was born in Colton, New York on March 2, 1832. He was employed by Remington in 1871, and he was on the United States Rifle Team which in 1874 fired in the Elcho Shield Long Range Match at Creedmore. The scores: U.S. 934, Irish 931.

When Remington went into receivership around 1886, Mr. Hepburn joined the Marlin Fire Arms Co. His inventions include the models 1888, 1889, 1891, 1892, 1893, 1894, 1895 and 1897 and others. Some of which, except for minor changes and model designations, are still in manufacture to this day.

If any one person can be credited with the success of the Marlin Firearms Co., my vote is for L.L. Hepburn.

Mr. Hepburn was injured in a fall on January 10, 1910. He continued to work for Marlin from his bed until his death four years later.

#### **THE MARLIN WWI PERIOD**

In 1915, Allied Companies of the J.P. Morgan Company formed a syndicate to manufacture the Colt model 1914 machine gun. The syndicate acquired the Marlin Firearms Company and other manufacturing facilities and incorporated as "The Marlin Arms Corporation" with assets of \$3,500,000. In 1916 a reorganization took place and the name of the company was changed to "The Marlin-Rockwell Corporation."

By December 1919 the Marlin-Rockwell empire had reached new heights in industrial conglomerate diversification. The executive offices were on Madison Avenue in New York City, and the following companies or divisions made up the corporation:

Standard Roller Bearings, Philadelphia, Pa.  
Braeburn Steel, Pittsburgh, Pa.  
Radiator Division (Mayo Radiator, New Haven)  
Marlin-Rockwell Machine Shop, Tacony, Pa.  
Plainville Div. Plainville, Conn.  
Heany Laboratory, New Haven, Conn.  
Insulated Wire Division, New Haven, Conn.  
Marlin Arms Division, New Haven, Conn.  
Marlin Rockwell Loading Co., Wilmington, Del.  
Norwich Division, Norwich, Conn. (H & A Co.)

A total of 60,751 machine guns of all types were manufactured by Marlin-Rockwell in New Haven during the war. At the end of the war the Marlin-Rockwell interest in sporting arms did not develop beyond a half-hearted attempt to return to that market. Instead, the Rockwell influence caused the company to dispose of all holdings except the bearing company.

A new company was formed in 1919 which acquired the property and buildings and the sporting part of the Marlin-Rockwell arms business. It was incorporated August 23, 1921, as the Marlin Firearms Corporation. This new company was headed by Mr. John F. Moran (formerly with the Mayo Radiator Company and with the Marlin-Rockwell expansion), who expected to re-establish this new company in the sporting arms business by adding to the regular Marlin line of rifles and shotguns the double and single barrel shotguns and handguns of the pre-war Hopkins and Allen line of firearms, thus claiming they would produce the most complete line of practical firearms in the world.

The dream of Mr. Moran, and the Marlin Firearm Corporation, was short lived. In 1925, it went into receivership and was sold by the Sheriff to satisfy the receivers.

#### **THE MARLIN FIREARMS CO.**

Mr. Frank Kenna acquired the property and buildings at the foreclosure sale of the Marlin Firearms Corporation. He opened and closed the bidding at \$100.00 and, of course, the Sheriff reminded him that there was a \$100,000 mortgage on the place. In due course, the mortgage was satisfied and the gun business was re-established.

Mr. Kenna was a prominent attorney in New Haven and well respected because of his numerous real estate activities. He was also an adventurist in trying to develop new businesses. The Marlin Firearms Co. not only manufactured a popular line of firearms but also ventured into bicycles, baby carriages, brushes, razor blades, real estate, shave cream, kid's wagons and a communication system (MID). The real estate, MID and firearms businesses became firmly established as a result of the vision

and ability of Mr. Frank Kenna, Sr. to survive weak markets, national emergencies and depression. His contribution is best described by his own words in the following unique report from a company president:

**REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT AT THE  
SPECIAL STOCKHOLDERS MEETING OF  
THE MARLIN FIREARMS COMPANY -  
NOVEMBER 28th, 1944**

After practically fourteen years of constant sacrifice, toil and effort, primarily in behalf of the stockholders of the company, I feel that I have succeeded in preserving for the stockholders, a value for their shares much in excess of what the shares originally cost them, and further, established the company on a sound financial basis, capable of paying a fair dividend annually or semi-annually.

Practically all of the stock now outstanding was issued during 1929 and 1930. Dividends to the extent of fourteen (\$14.00) dollars was paid thereon. Then began the long period of depression which in 1933 almost wiped out the company. One of the largest gun companies in the country did go into receivership with the resulting loss of the stockholders investment.

As a matter of fact the investment of every stockholder in The Marlin Firearms Company, both the preferred and common, was entirely lost in 1933, but by using every possible means at my command, by personal endorsements, by hypothecation of my insurance policies, by personally borrowing from every source available, and by putting into the company every dollar I possessed, I managed to regain title to the company's real estate, machinery, equipment and business.

No appeal was made to any stockholder, for such an appeal, considering the time and conditions, was useless. The depression was at its depth, and what had to be done had to be done without delay.

Unable to pay real estate taxes due the City of New Haven, amounting to approximately \$22,000.00, foreclosure proceedings were instituted by the City. At practically the same time, two other foreclosure actions were started, one by the first mortgage trustee, seeking payment of the sum of \$41,875.00, the balance due on a first mortgage originally amounting to \$100,000.00; and the second by the second mortgage trustee, seeking to foreclose a second mortgage of \$150,000.00. Both of these mortgages encumbered the property when your stock was purchased.

All of these foreclosures, seeking approximately \$193,000.00 were fought and defended for months in the courts, while every possible effort that I could make was exerted to find some way of saving the company, its real estate and equipment, and the investment of every stockholder. My own large investment, and the years of effort put into building up the company were then a matter of secondary importance.

Although I had succeeded in raising funds sufficient to pay the taxes of approximately \$22,000.00, these could not be paid in view of the pending mortgage foreclosures.

Again months of effort were spent in trying to prevent the complete loss of all of the properties, and these efforts were continued even after the courts had granted foreclosure judgments, and the first and second mortgage trustees had taken title to the property, both the real estate and all machinery and equipment. For more than eighty (80) days we were operating with a sheriff in legal possession of the plant. The real estate was in fact advertised for sale by the first mortgagee.

In the meantime, by means of a loan made to me for which I paid a large bonus, and for which I was personally responsible,

by draining other companies which I owned personally, of every dollar they could spare, by pledging my insurance policies, by putting in all of the personal cash I could raise, and by personally guaranteeing repayment unconditionally, I managed to prevent the sale of the properties, by satisfying the mortgagees and the tax claims.

When title to the property, both real estate and machinery was reconveyed by the mortgagees, although this title could have been retained by me and in fact was conveyed to me individually, it was arranged whereby title was conveyed by me, back to the company, and in fact back to the stockholders.

At no time during the long continuation of the court actions involved, and the efforts made to save the company were the stockholders appealed to.

Subsequently, a Reconstruction Finance Corporation mortgage of \$70,000.00 helped to tide over the difficult years that followed, and today the plant and equipment are entirely free and clear of any mortgage.

The foregoing tells only a part of the many difficult situations that the company has survived, but it may serve to make more clear just what I alone have done in carrying the company from foreclosure and bankruptcy to the present time when every preferred stockholder's original investment has been rebuilt, and the company established in a position where dividends may be resumed.

Each preferred stockholder who purchased four shares of stock paid \$100.00. He received a \$52.00 shotgun and \$14.00 in dividends. His net investment on each \$100.00 was \$34.00. Today his stock is worth the full par value, on the basis of book value, although it might not sell for this amount in the open market.

We desire to establish the fair non-cumulative dividend rate of \$4 per year, and to eliminate dividends unpaid during the several previous difficult years.

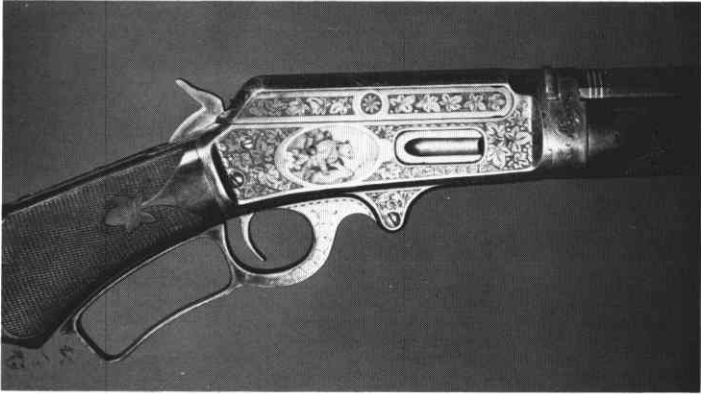
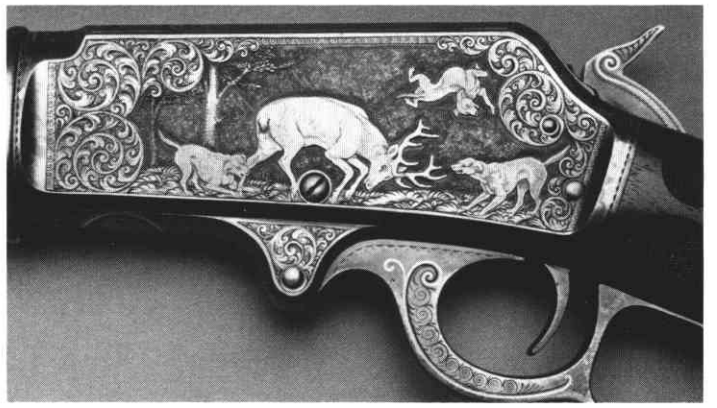
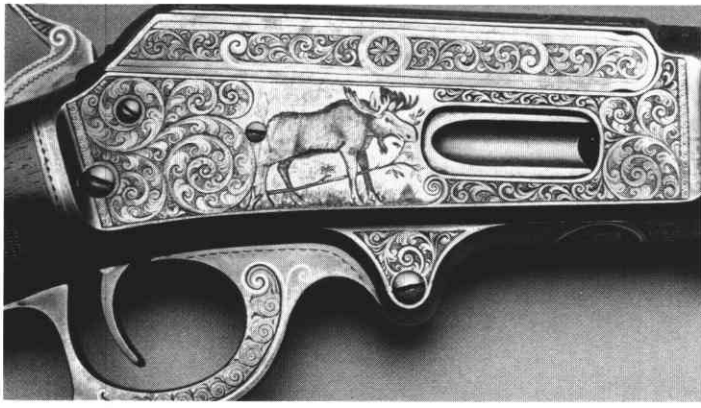
I feel that in asking the stockholders to consent to these provisions, considering what I have done to save their investment, is only requesting some small measure of recognition and appreciation for all that has been accomplished by my own unaided efforts.

Frank Kenna, President

Upon the death of Mr. Frank Kenna, Sr. in 1947, his son, Roger, took over the leadership of the company. After Roger's untimely death at the age of 48 in 1958, his brother, Frank Kenna, Jr. assumed the leadership of Marlin in 1959.

In 1969, Mr. Kenna moved the company from the old plant in New Haven to a new multi-million dollar plant in North Haven, Connecticut. In so doing, he expanded production by adding new technology and methodology and improved quality; increased business resulted and today the Marlin Firearms Co. is the largest manufacturer of shoulder-fired rifles in America.





Three engraved Marlin Model 1893 rifles and a Model 1895 at the bottom.